



Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.

Kilton Road
Six Bedford Farms, Suite 607
Bedford, New Hampshire 03110-6532
603 644-0888
FAX 603 644-2385

Attendees: See Attached List

Date/Time: 3/22/00 3:00pm

Project No.: 50885

Place: Southern NH Planning
Commission Office

Re: I-93 Salem to Manchester Advisory Task
Force Meeting

Notes taken by: Bruce Tasker

Jeff welcomed all the Advisory Task Force (ATF) Members and reviewed a meeting agenda (attached).

He then asked the members to introduce themselves and describe what each member would like to see from this project.

Bill Sturgis, SNHPC, explained that he would like to see the highway widened and the interchanges improved in a reasonable and expeditious manner.

Alan Swan, Derry, stated that he heard the citizens of Derry at the Officials Meeting ask that the process be moved along. This project is important to the State and hopefully the five communities will unite together as this project is in their common interest.

Carol Granfield, Derry, explained that she is anxious to widen the highway as quickly as possible. She is hopeful that the process can be expedited.

Al Turner, Windham, noted that the reconstruction in Nashua took 10 years, so it is important to get this project going.

Bruce Thomas, Manchester, reiterated the need to expedite the project and the process.

Kevin Sheppard, Manchester, explained that he sees this as a positive project for Manchester and the region. He noted that the project will enhance access to the Manchester Airport.

Cliff Sinnott, Rockingham Regional Planning Commission, explained that he is sitting in for Tom Case today. Cliff hopes to see the road widened. Hopefully, the project can move forward more rapidly than other projects of this scale. Cliff also noted the need for coordination between NH and Mass officials.

Keith Wolters, Salem, expressed the opinion that this is an exciting project, which is long overdue. He feels that the widening should involve 8-lanes.

Jim Turse, Salem was concerned about minimizing impacts related to the proposed reconstruction of I-93.

Andre' Garron, Londonderry, explained that the project should be a benefit to Londonderry and the region.

Jeff discussed what he sees as the role of the ATF. (See attached handout)

He suggested that the primary function of the ATF is to help facilitate the project process as it moves through the various steps by fostering communication. ATF meetings will hopefully be a mechanism for disseminating information about the project to the public and collecting information about the project from the public.

The ATF should not consider itself a decision making body, but more advisory in nature. The Department hopes to obtain informed opinions from individual members and consensus from the group as a whole. He suggested that the meetings be held in the evening so that ATF members and the public can attend. Hopefully, all members will be able come to all of the meetings.

Relative to meeting formats, typically there would be a presentation of meeting minutes, followed by a presentation of materials, and finally a discussion amongst ATF members. The meeting would then be open to the public and hopefully generate some dialogue. Meetings should be rotated through each at the five communities with a meeting approximately every 6 weeks. All members present agreed that the meetings would be scheduled for Thursdays at 6:00pm. The first meeting was tentatively scheduled for April 20, 2000.

Jeff asked that if anyone would like to be the ATF Chairperson. There were no volunteers, although it was suggested that Tom Case be considered as he has served ably on other similar committees. Jeff will contact Tom.

Jeff Brillhart explained the Background and Purpose of the Project

This project involves at constructing improvements along I-93 between state line Salem and the I-93 I-293 split in Manchester, a distance of approximately 18 miles or so.

The Department is proposing to widen the north and southbound barrels from the existing two lanes in each direction to three or four lanes in each direction. In addition, the five interchanges along this section of I-93 would be reconstructed or otherwise improved.

The project is a part of the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Program. It was included in the original Ten-Year Plan adopted back in 1986.

The Department first began looking at what might be needed along the corridor in 1988 and 89. As the Department proceeded, the Environmental Resource Agencies indicated that a much more in-depth environmental study would be necessary to consider all alternatives and justify the proposed widening. In 1991, the Department agreed to conduct the highest level of study, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The EIS was underway in 1992, and at that point questions were raised as to the Department's methodology for projecting future traffic volumes on I-93 and how improvements to I-93 interfaced with the rest of the transportation network in NH. The outcome of the discussion was to have a consultant create a Statewide Transportation Corridor Model.

By 1998, the model was nearing completion, the Department hired VHB to do the engineering and provide overall coordination for the EIS.

Over the last 2 years, base mapping has been updated; existing environmental (natural, cultural, socio-economic) resources have been cataloged, mapped, and evaluated; the model has been calibrated and traffic data has been developed; and the overall background information put together so that alternatives can be considered in a reasonable way.

The purpose of the project is to improve transportation efficiency and reduce safety problems associated with this 18-mile segment of I-93. Options include reactivating rail service; improving bus service and other Transportation Demand Management Strategies (like Park & Ride accommodations, Intelligent Transportation Systems technology), widening the highway and improving the interchanges.

I-93 is a major interstate highway, and perhaps the major transportation link in NH. It is vital to NH's social and economic well being and it is in need of being improved.

The highway has a theoretical capacity to carry in the vicinity of 60,000 to 70,000 vpd. In the Salem area, the highway currently carries over 100,000 vpd. By 2020, the projected volumes are approximately 140,000 vpd. The projected volumes are on the conservative side; that is they are low in comparison to earlier projections.

Regardless, the highway is beyond being over capacity. The amount of traffic results in the highway being less forgiving and consequently less safe. The demand on the corridor requires consideration of significant improvements. This study is intended to provide a thorough review of the issues, options, and ramifications, so that the State can move forward with constructing the necessary improvements.

Tony Grande discussed the Regional Map and 400 scale base plans and project issues

Regional Location Map

- The map shows surrounding towns and major roadways east and west of I-93.
- The segment under study begins at the NH/MA state line and proceeds approximately 18 miles to the I-293/I-93 split.
- Also shown on the map are 3 existing and one potential rail corridor:
 - the West corridor is the existing rail line from Lowell, MA, north through Nashua, Merrimack, Bedford and up to Manchester,
 - the East corridor is the abandoned M&L rail line and it extends from Lawrence, MA, north through Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and up to Manchester;
 - the Portland to Boston rail corridor through Dover, Exeter, Plaistow to Lawrence MA. This existing rail corridor currently under reconstruction and service is expected to begin in Jan. 2001;
 - an I-93 median rail corridor alternative is proposed.

400 Scale Map

The 400 scale base map and color coding shows the existing conditions (existing pavement, existing buildings, right of way, etc) and resources (wetlands, open water, potential historic districts and structures, etc). The map begins at the MA/NH state line and proceeds northerly for approx. 18 miles through the Towns of Salem, Windham, Derry, Londonderry and Manchester, ending at the I-93/I-293 split.

Existing Conditions / Problem areas

- Highway was built in the 1960's and consequently has substandard geometrics and components in areas.(cable guard rail; 4' inside shoulder)
- Back ups currently occur along the mainline traveling SB in the morning and NB in the evening particularly in the southern half of the corridor.
- Back ups also occur at several interchange locations where the interchange is unable to process the volumes of traffic and traffic backs up onto the highway. Of particular concern is the Exit 3 NB off ramp and the Exit 5 SB off ramp.
- The congestion is the result of the highway at, or exceeding capacity.
- Weaving/merging traffic at Exit 2 SB is a problem.

- Acceleration and deceleration areas are inadequate in length for on and off ramps; a longer transition would allow drivers more time and give a better comfort level getting on and off the highway.

Recent Roadway and Bridge Work Completed in the I-93 Corridor

- Exit 1 NB lane addition as part of the Rockingham Mall development (1990) added capacity.
- Salem rest area reconstruction (1993) improved facility capacity and access.
- Exit 4 interchange reconstruction (1990) added capacity.
- Weigh stations in Windham currently under construction to improve truck safety.
- Windham Bridge over 111A (replaced 1994)
- Windham – Bridges over North Lowell Road (replaced 1994/96)
- Derry – Bridges over Fordway Extension (widened & rehab – 1996)
- Derry – Bridges over Kendall Pond Road (widened & rehab – 1996)
- Londonderry – Bridges over Stonehenge Road (replaced 1994/95)
- Manchester – Bridges over Cohas Brook and Bodwell Road (widened & rehab – construction underway)

Three types of environmental resources to be evaluated include natural, cultural, socio-economic resources. Secondary impacts (those which occur as an indirect result of constructing an improved highway system) are also of concern and will be evaluated.

Some of the potential resource concerns that have been identified to date, include:

- Property impacts (and noise impacts) where buildings/neighborhoods/commercial developments are close to I-93 or interchange areas.
- Porcupine Brook/Prime Wetlands - Salem
- Potential flood issues - Salem
- Canobie Lake – Drinking water supply - Windham
- Cobbetts Pond residential and recreational area -Windham
- Archaeological (median) & Historic Resources (Searles Castle-Windham)
- Prime Wetlands – Derry
- Cohas Brook – Manchester

The range of alternatives to be evaluated for this project:

- No Build – used as baseline for comparison.
- TSM Improvements; projects that can enhance safety and provide some congestion relief, generally within the ROW (adding or extending turn lanes, providing or improving traffic signals, employing Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technology).
- Widen I-93 to 6 or 8 lanes.
- Widen I-93 to 8 lanes w/HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle), lanes for vehicles w/2 or more passengers.
- TDM Strategies- opportunities which reduce demand on the highway system (i.e. park & ride lots, ridesharing, transit bus and train- including consideration of an I-93 median rail corridor for a passenger only rail service with possible stations located at Exits 2,3,4,5).

Jeff Brillhart Reviewed the Project Process and Schedule

There are three stages a project goes through once it is on the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Program. These are:

1. Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation and approval of a layout.

2. Final Design and Purchase of Right-of-Way.
3. Construction.

The project is currently in the first Stage – Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation.

Within the Preliminary Design and Environmental Documentation stage, there are typically five phases:

1. Scoping Phase – data collection and issues identification.
2. Alternatives Phase – develop and screen conceptual alternatives.
3. Detail Alternatives Phase – develop detailed alternatives.
4. Environmental Documentation and Public Hearing Phase – develop draft environmental documentation and hold Public Hearing.
5. Finalize Environmental Document and Obtain Approvals Phase.

The Department is just completing the Scoping Phase (data collection and issues identification) and is proceeding forward with the Alternatives Phase (developing conceptual alternatives).

The completion of the Scoping Phase will be signified by the publication of the Scoping Report, due out in May.

The completion of the Alternatives Phase will be signified by the publication of the Rationale Report, due out January 2001.

Completion of the Draft EIS and the holding of the Public Hearing are scheduled for January 2002, and approvals are scheduled for January 2003. Construction will begin in early 2004.

An ATF committee has been established to review issues and information periodically through the study process. Each Community has appointed two members and the two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) have appointed one member each. The first meeting is March 22nd in Manchester. Subsequent meetings will occur about every 6 weeks, in the various towns along the route.

The next series of Public Official meetings are anticipated to be held in August/September of this year at which conceptual designs will be available.

Jeff then opened the meeting up to questions;

Andre Garron, What is the general role that the ATF will be charged with?

Jeff. The role of the ATF is to provide continuity to the project and facilitate communication between the Department and the Public. The ATF is advisory in nature providing recommendations through informed opinions and consensus. Decision making comes about in the following manner: Once the Department comes up with a preferred alternative (based in part on the work of the ATF as well as the public, public officials, and the resource agencies), the Department will hold a Public Hearing chaired by three members appointed by the Governor and Council.

Approval for the project must come from the Special Committee appointed by the Governor and Council, as well as the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the NH Wetlands Bureau.

Cliff, Sinnott, Will you be asking the ATF what they think of the design at some time?

Jeff. Yes, designs will be presented as they are developed for the various segments along the corridor. The first round of designs will be available over the course of the next 6 months.

Al Turner, Is funding going to be available for the project?

Jeff. Federal funds are programmed for this project at a ratio of 90 % federal/ 10 % state. Currently \$140M is programmed. The primary focus is to widen I-93 and improve the interchanges, as well as improve bus service. There are limitations as to what can be done in the state, relative to using gas tax funds for some non-highway purposes, such as railroad. The Lowell to Nashua rail improvements will use federal CMAQ funds and other federal funds. Major highway improvements, such as being considered for I-93, may require a serious investment in alternative modes of transportation to obtain federal approvals, and there may be a need or opportunity to utilize project funds to assist rail service or other transportation modes. That remains to be seen. The Department is looking to widen the I-93 but in doing so, design the widening so as not to preclude a rail option in the I-93 corridor. Whether the I-93 rail, or the long discontinued, rail between Manchester, Salem and Lawrence would someday be put into service is probably a question for another study. Bill O'Donnell noted that the funding for any rail would come from the Federal side.

Bill Sturgis, Do you see any concern over the funding becoming not available?

Jeff. Funding is dependent on the federal government continuing to provide funds in the amounts that have been set forth in current legislation. It is unlikely that funding for the project will be reprioritized for some other projects. To do so would be difficult politically given the way the Ten Year Plan process has evolved since this project was first identified. Federal funding legislation (ISTEA) mandated that state planning agencies and the Department schedule projects within a fiscally constrained planning process. The Department uses a 10-year time frame and the list of projects and funding gets updated every 2 years. This program identifies funding for all projects. The Legislature is now getting ready to finalize the next Ten Year Plan. As soon as that plan is adopted, the process starts all over again for the next 2-year update to the 10 Year Plan. To add a project generally results in the project being added to the end of the Ten Year Plan. To "leap frog ahead" is problematic. In addition, with I-93, the need for the project and the benefits to the state as a whole, probably rule out funding changes for I-93.

Andre Garron, Funding aside, how much time are we buying? If final construction ends in the year 2010, we need to start planning sometime between 2010 and 2020 to identify some other alternatives to meet our needs. How serious is the state and federal government looking into other alternatives?

Jeff. The Department is very serious. Considering highway expansion beyond four lanes does not appear to be realistic. Instead, the future alternatives lie in providing for rail, bus, and high occupancy vehicles (HOV). The other side of the coin is land use. As much as the municipalities would like us to, the Department is unable to address this issue, which can play an important role in making transportation efficient and safe. Towns need to do a better job of planning.

Kevin Sheppard, I realize the DOT will be looking at widening alternatives. However, will you be looking at new location alternatives?

Jeff. All Alternatives will primarily take place within the existing corridor. The Department is not looking at new location alternatives. It is possible that some of the interchanges will be reconfigured, but the widening will be pretty much adjacent to the existing alignments.

Cliff Sinnott, 1/. How does this plan look at what Massachusetts is doing along I-93? i.e., HOV lanes? 2/. What is the April 15 meeting with " Mass Rail and Transit Officials"?

Jeff. 1/. Merrimack Valley Regional Planning Commission is beginning a detailed study of the existing three-lane section from the state line to the existing four-lane section to the south. VHB will act as a consultant for the project. The two states need to coordinate. Relative to HOV lanes, it would appear to be desirable to have any HOV lanes in New Hampshire extend into Massachusetts. Then again, it may be reasonable to develop an HOV lane in New Hampshire only. Recently the Mass Highway Department (MHD), published information indicating their concern that extending HOV lanes out of Boston further north could overload the existing HOV lane (too many vehicles) as it enters Boston and reduce its ability to operate effectively. 2/. The Department sent a copy of the draft Rail Alternatives Report to Massachusetts for review and comment. The meeting in the project schedule will not be happening in light of the Department's need to flesh out this I-93 rail option, but a meeting at some point is needed to begin addressing mutual issues of concern.

Jim Turse, Salem is looking at utilizing the existing rail corridor adjacent to NH 28 as part of the rails to trails program.